

Yacovelli Said to Succeed Colombo in Mafia Family

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By NICHOLAS GAGE

Joseph Yacovelli is "giving the orders" in the Mafia "family" said to have been headed by Joseph A. Colombo Sr., according to underworld informants and Federal and state agents.

The sources said Yacovelli took over after Colombo was shot just before the Italian-American Unity Day rally at Columbus Circle last June 28.

Yacovelli, 42 years old, is "extremely close" to Carmine Persico and could be acting for him, the agents said. Persico, who heads the biggest unit of the family, has been sentenced to 14 years in prison for hijacking and is free on bail pending appeal.

Meanwhile, Daniel P. Hollman, chief of the Joint Strike Force to Combat Organized Crime, said yesterday that he did not believe that rivals in the Mafia were behind the shooting of Colombo as the police have asserted.

He said the shooting appeared to be the work of a "psychopath." Jerome A. Johnson, the man who police said shot Colombo — and who was killed by an unknown person—



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Joseph Yacovelli leaving Brooklyn Federal court.

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ported to have been named consigliere (councilor), the third most powerful post in a Mafia family.

The family's underboss, Salvatore Mineo, is 73 and ailing, so many issues have naturally been referred to Yacovelli for decision since the shooting of Colombo, the Federal official said.

Colombo was taken to Roosevelt Hospital after the shooting. He remained there until last

weekend, when he was moved to the home of his son Anthony. He was still in a comatose condition when he was moved.

A Roosevelt Hospital official said just before the transfer that "Colombo's chances of survival were good, but his chances of showing appreciable improvement in his ability to function would have to be considered poor."

The knowledge in Colombo's Mafia family that he was not likely to recover enough to resume power sparked maneuvering for his position as family boss, according to underworld informants and law-enforcement officials.

The sources said that while Yacovelli had emerged as the man giving the orders, he had not been confirmed as permanent boss. If he does not perform well, he could be replaced, they said.

Yacovelli has shown the kind of caution and reserve in his career that makes him acceptable to the traditionalists in the city's Mafia families who scorned Colombo's freewheeling tactics, according to the informants and lawmen.

Fusco Has Backing

The traditionalists favored Frank Richard Fusco, 67, who allegedly runs one of the most flourishing gambling operations in Brooklyn, sources indicate.

Fusco's respect for Mafia procedures, his efficiency and his reputation as a big money-maker earned him the admiration of older Mafia leaders.

But Colombo's family, they said, was made up mostly of younger men who would not welcome a leader of Fusco's age.

Yacovelli is short and stocky, with black hair combed back flat against his head. His hobby is making his own wine, which is highly praised by those who have tasted it. Unlike most Mafiosi, who are family oriented, he is not married.

Yacovelli's caution, officials

said, is demonstrated by the fact that he has been convicted only once, for unlawful entry in 1945, although he has been arrested a number of times since then. He received a suspended sentence for the 1945 conviction.

Dennis Dillon, head of the Federal crime task force in Brooklyn, said yesterday that Yacovelli gave his last permanent address as 168 Mulberry Street when questioned by his office. The Federal official said that Yacovelli no longer lived there.

Yacovelli told Mr. Dillon on Monday that he was engaged as a "spotter" by Cord's Garment Delivery Service 456 Ninth Avenue. A spotter checks for thefts in shipments.

Yacovelli has never bothered to build up an organization of his own in the family, but has allied himself to the Persico group, according to law enforcement officials.

These facts have led to speculation that he is acting as a front man for Persico, who cannot make a bid for the family leadership because of the long prison term he faces.

A new boss of a Mafia family would have to be confirmed by the Mafia national commission, said to be made up of the leaders of the largest families in the country, before he could claim permanent hold on the job. That has not happened yet in the case of Yacovelli, lawmen said.

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"was just not the type of individual to be given a professional job like this," Mr. Hollman said.

Chief of Detectives Albert A. Seedman said at a news conference that he stood by his earlier statements that organized crime ordered the shooting to discredit the Italian-American Civil Rights League, which Colombo founded.

"We're not changing our stand at all," he said. "The fact (Johnson) might be a psychopath doesn't mean he did it on his own."

The investigation of the Colombo shooting has run into "a lot of stumbling blocks," Chief Seedman said. "We have developed a lot of information, and we hope we will get to the bottom of this mess soon and make some arrests."

On Monday, Yacovelli was called before a Federal grand jury in Brooklyn that is investigating organized crime involvement in legitimate business, and he was reported to have refused to answer questions.

Yacovelli has risen fast in the family in the last few years, according to law enforcement officials. A Justice Department list given to a Senate investigating committee in 1969 identified him as a captain in the group.

Earlier this year, he was re-